

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission – Charter and District Collaboration Committee

Community Education Building

Meeting Minutes – November 18, 2015

The Committee Co-chairs, Aretha Miller and Dr. Eve Buckley, called the meeting to order at 5:40 p.m.

The Co-chairs gave the committee an update on the work underway.

- The Commission met last night (November 17, 2015) to discuss the Interim Redistricting Report, which is now available online at www.solutionsfordelawareschools.com. Open for public comment. The public comment guidelines are also available at www.solutionsfordelawareschools.com.
- The Commission will review any changes to the draft on the meeting on December 9, and will vote to submit the final plan on December 15.
- The committee will typically have an external presenter, and also leave time to work through the items on their agenda. The Co-chairs plan to have Senator Bryan Townsend come to either the December or January meeting to discuss his work with the Charter/District Collaboration task force. When the Enrollment Preferences Taskforce has an update, they will invite Representative Kim Williams to discuss it.
- There will be a call with all of the committee Co-chairs every Friday going forward to ensure that the work is aligned. The Co-chairs are also planning to hold joint meetings, first with the Redistricting Committee but also will the other committees. It is important to make sure all of the committees are on the same page to continue to have productive conversations.

The minutes were approved with one correction.

The agenda was approved.

The committee Co-chairs began the discussion of the Interim Redistricting Plan, and asked if anyone had questions or comments about the role of Charters in the Commission or any language to propose. The following items were discussed about the Interim Plan:

- The statement in the Plan, “The Colonial School District should consider collaborations and new programs that will strengthen support for its Wilmington students” implies that Colonial is not already collaborating with other districts and charter schools, which it is.
- The Colonial School Board voted to keep the students that are currently in Colonial and not change the boundaries. They passed a resolution supporting Red Clay and Christina’s Board resolutions, and said that they would consider the possibility of expanding into the city.
- It is necessary to look at measures other than test scores to determine success.
- The Plan is light on the impact on charter schools, though it does discuss the impact of charter schools on traditional schools.

- The discussion of facilities needs to be a part of the plan, i.e., will charters have access to facilities that will not be used by any of the districts, as mandated by DE code?
- Specifying the mechanism for collaboration seems premature since we do not have all the information that is needed to make this happen.
- The draft lacks objectivity in relation to charter schools and does not lend any flexibility to the committee to determine the best process forward.
 - o The last paragraph was highlighted by committee members because the language was vague. Some members found this problematic, while others argued that the vagueness itself offered the committee leeway to determine steps forward.
- Magnet schools must be a part of the conversation about choice.
- It is important to look at charter schools as opportunities, not just a challenge.
- The section about an “expedited choice” zone was discussed, and the Committee questioned what this means.
- The collaboration in the BRINC Consortium is a great example of collaboration already underway. The implication that collaboration is not happening anywhere is incorrect.

The Committee began a discussion about funding.

- The funding so far has been focused on the districts, Christina and Red Clay, and has not been child focused. With an inequity of funding between traditional and charter schools there will not be an opportunity for collaboration.
- Any decision about weighted funding should follow the child, as it does in the current system.
- The focus needs to be on equitable funding for all schools. This should be a pre-requisite for collaboration.
- An example was given about teachers not having the resources they need to serve high-needs students, and the concern that adding high-needs students would make those resources even more inequitable.
- There are many charter schools in the City of Wilmington, primarily those serving K-8, serving high-needs populations.
- The children should be getting the same services wherever they are. Committee members noted that it is important for staff to know is where the money is going and how it is being used – is it actually being used to support the resources that students need in the classroom? Resources should be distributed and used in an equitable manner. The committee noted that each district will use the resources allotted to it in a manner that reflects its particular context. Therefore, while the funding may follow the students, it does not mean they will get exactly the same resources and that is not something that can be changed.
- Committee members discussed the definition of “sustainable funding” and use of language that benefits the student, not the adults. The Committee identified a working-group to draft new language to submit for the Plan.

The Committee agreed that collaboration is not possible if there is a stark disparity in funding and resources because it continues the cycle of competition among charter schools and districts.

The Committee discussed the idea of a charter consortium posed in the WEAC recommendations.

- The challenge that has been noted is that while all of the schools in the district come under one umbrella, each charter school that is authorized by the state is its own district essentially creating 23 mini districts that serve students with nothing that connects them.
 - o If this is the case, then how does removing one or two districts solve the governance challenge?
- The word “fragmentation” implies a negative, but if these choice options provide benefits to students, is that really a bad thing?
- Collaboration creates efficiency, but it cannot be forced.
- If collaboration does not happen naturally then does it need to be mandated? The argument was made that a mandate does not allow for collaboration.
- The committee discussed the statewide plan for the configuration of schools, which is occurring at DOE. The committee will address how to contribute to that work.

The Co-chairs allowed for a first round of public comment.

- Collaboration should be defined by this committee.
- The Committee should voice their opinion in the SREO process and the statewide plan.
- Sharing a building, as was the intention of the original charter law, creates a situation in which multiple schools have to collaborate and work together to maintain efficiency in the building, while still running their own schools. This method “forces” collaboration and creates efficiency. Charters were never intended to go out and purchase private buildings, they were intended to utilize space in existing public school buildings. Putting two, or more, schools together allows for living collaboration.
- Charter Schools Network is already working with charter and traditional school schools and and they are already collaborating. It is important to define collaboration and discuss the problem that they are working to solve.
- Funding should not be a prerequisite for collaboration, as collaboration is already happening without funding.
- On December 5 from 10-2pm there is a school choice expo. In collaboration with the Christina Cultural Arts Center and PACE network. Northern NCC, VO-tech, and charter schools to discuss with families the choices they have.

The Co-chairs began the discussion again.

The co-chairs noted that there was updated data from the University of Delaware. They have requested more finely compared demographic data to identify which schools are doing particularly well with particular subgroups and look for opportunities for collaboration. As mentioned in the last meeting, committee members think that it is important to identify the

range of students who are being served in each school and as well as the type of program that is being offered, to look for opportunities for collaboration. A recommendation was made that the Commission should have a repository for the data that are being collected so that the various committees as a whole are working from the same set of data points.

A suggestion was made to have a cross-committee data subgroup that could work to identify data that are needed as well as make sure the Commission's work is aligned.

A point was made that it is important to understand what the data questions are and which myths that need to be dispelled, rather than just looking at data for the sake of data.

- It is important that the Commission as a whole and the other committees are making determinations based on facts rather than on perceptions about charter or district schools.
- Need to discuss enhancing and building upon collaboration and not assume that it is not occurring already.

The Co-chairs began a discussion about the glossary. The first question was: How are we defining Collaboration? There was general agreement that the conditions must be ideal in order for effective collaboration to take place. For example,

- o There needs to be a term for charters, magnet, and vo-tech schools.
- o All public school sectors must come together to address the needs of struggling students.
- o There is a financial cost associated with collaboration among schools and districts and so it was recommended that the different sectors come together to create a "collaboration pool of money" that would pay for transportation, substitutes who would cover for the teachers who are visiting other schools and districts.
 - This collaboration must be worthwhile for districts, teachers, and students.
- o There needs to be support for grassroots collaboration, i.e., for teachers to be able to work together across schools in and outside of their districts or charter schools.
- o There needs to be a culture shift where school and district administrators become open to collaboration
- o Sustainable collaboration is important for efficiency – it has to be a long-term commitment.
- o Relationship building and trust are the most important start to collaboration: school leaders must feel comfortable to call and ask a colleague in another school about what is working and not working.
 - Leaders must make the commitment to collaboration. They need to see other schools as partners and not competitors and acknowledge that they have a shared vision.
- o One big challenge posed is the current funding structure: using the September 30 count for funding creates competition and animosity between districts and schools.
 - The Funding Student Success Committee has begun to discuss this and should be addressed further in collaboration with this committee.

- Expected outcomes for collaboration:
 - Efficient use of resources is key.
 - Collaboration in the end would save money.

The Co-chairs allowed for final public comment.

- Senate Joint Resolution 4 was acknowledged to note that the committees and task-forces in the state should work together and not do the same work twice.

The meeting adjourned at 7:32 p.m.

**Wilmington Education Improvement Commission
Charter and District Collaboration Committee
Attendance at the 11/18 Meeting**

Committee Members

Aretha Miller, Co-chair
Eve Buckley, Co-chair
Dusty Blakey
David Davis
Bill Doolittle

Equetta Jones
Margie Lopez Waite
Michele Savage
Cora Scott
Chuck Taylor

Members of the Public

Ziyad Selim
Christina Gaetano
Kendal Massett

Henry Clampitt
Lynn Howard

Institute for Public Administration Staff

Kelly Sherretz
Elizabeth Burland